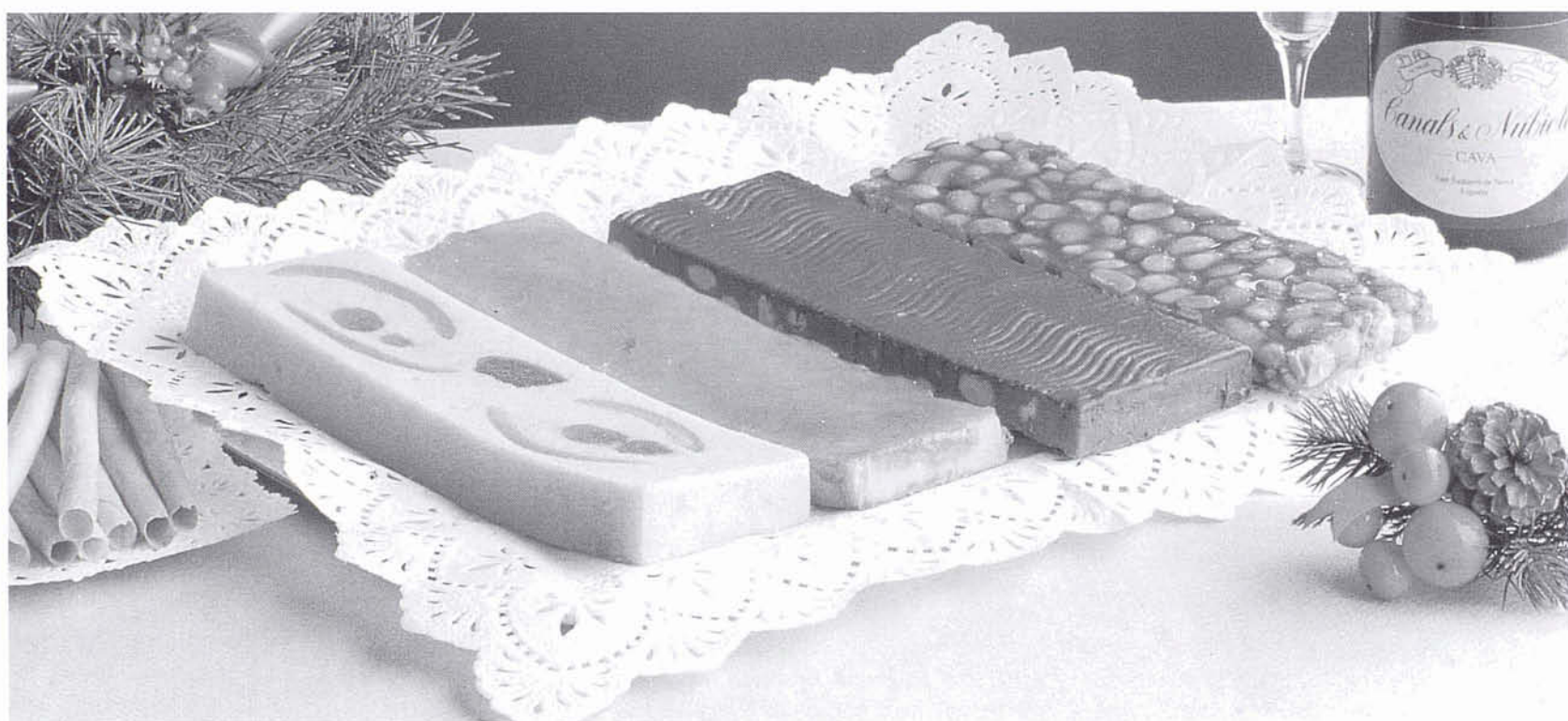


“TORRONS”: TRADITION AND MODERNITY



THE “TORRONS” OF XIXONA ARE KNOWN TO HAVE EXISTED BEFORE THE 14TH CENTURY. THEY ARE STILL PRODUCED TODAY BY THE METHODS IN USE THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO AND ARE AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF INCOME FOR THE REGION.

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The traditional *torrons* are known to have existed in Xixona since before the 14th century. According to some sources, the invention is attributed to the Arabs. Others, however, attribute it to the Sephardic Jews and some even speak of the Phoenicians or Hebrews in this respect. However, none of the versions question the fact that *torró* was invented in Xixona. Don Antonio Martínez Montañó, King Philip 2nd's cook, visited Xixona at the end of the 16th century and came away with an idea fixed firmly in his head: "All the houses of Xixona smell of warm honey vapour, because in all of them *torró* is made". The sentence could be valid today as well. Obviously, Xixona has grown, and the *torró*, rather than being made in the houses, is produced in modern factories. All the same, any talk of Christmas inevitably brings to mind this town, situated just at the point where the land of Alicante starts to rise up towards the mountains. The production, packaging and distribution have been modernised, but tradition is still one of the great features with which the product appears on the market.

The Challenge of New Flavours

After countless years on the market, *torró* is still made as it was three hundred years ago, using entirely natural raw materials of great quality, such as almonds, honey, sugar and white of egg. Until now, the soft *torró* of Xixona and the hard *torró* of Alicante represented the extent of the offer of Christmas products, increased not long ago by the *torrons* of chocolate, almond cream and toasted egg-yolk.

In the words of Josep Ignasi Jiménez, president of the National Association of *Torró* and Marzipan Manufacturers and director of the firm of Monerris Planellas

SA, the evolving society and the change in traditional Christmas celebrations are what have driven them to look for alternatives. According to the Association's president, the drop in *torró* consumption is due to the fact that the holidays have lost their family spirit and because young people are eating less of it. Precisely to attract these potential new clients, most of the sector has decided to launch a whole series of *torrons* with new flavours. The main novelty this year have been the *tafonats*, produced in a range of flavours to suit every palate: raisins, brandy, coffee, orange, and kiwi, apple or peach liqueur. And if these are not enough, there are the pralines. This type is available in lime, mokka, marron glacé or filled with liqueurs. This extensive assortment is intended to attract a public which no longer buys traditional products and which makes up almost 30 % of the real market. The other 70 %, the people who buy traditional *torrons*, has remained unchanged for years, and this is leading the sector towards a growth crisis which prevents the evolution of firms who see how, year after year, their sales increase by 3 or 4 % at most.

A Profitable Sector

The better part of the state's *torró* production is concentrated in the town of Xixona, in Alicante. Well-known brands like "El Lobo", "1.880", "La Fama", "Turrón 25", "La Jijonenca", "Antiu Xixona" or "El Almendro" are prepared in Xixona and fill the streets with great factories which, for the time being, still stand side by side with the small home-industries manufacturing products of high quality but little commercial importance.

Last year, the sector made a profit of

between 25,000 and 30,000 million pesetas, on a total production amounting to almost 25 million tons. All this production required approximately 12 million kilos of almonds, grown exclusively in Spain. According to the quality, each bar of *torró* contains between 50 and 65 % of almonds. The most highly valued almonds are the "MARCONA" type, considered as being the best quality.

A company like Monerris Planellas SA sells 90 % of its production to the national market and only 10 % is exported. The main importers are countries with a strong Hispanic element in their populations, such as Central and South America, and the states of Florida, New York and California, in the USA, the biggest customer. In one year, this same firm produces more than 4,000 tons, which represents sales of over 4,000 million pesetas. 50 % of this production consists of the traditional *torrons* of Xixona and Alicante, and the other 50 % is made up of the other varieties. In contrast, the factories of Saragossa and Catalonia concentrate on the elaboration of walnut cream, fruit or liqueur *torrons*.

One important factory in Xixona turns out approximately 4,000 bars of *torró* an hour. Eight hours' work produces more than 6 tons of marzipan figures and some five tons of chocolate *torró*. In the same time, sixteen tons of almonds are peeled and eight tons are roasted. The *torró* industry spends over 1,000 million pesetas on advertising its products. Products which, apart from the process of packaging and the energy source driving the machines, are still made by the method invented by the inhabitant of Xixona who one day started stirring a mixture of almonds and honey as he/she heated it over the woodfire. ●